

he read Camus
got into knife fights
in the street
made it with more girls
than the rest of us
dreamed of.

something was on fire
at the core of him
anyone who went near
felt that fire.

in his artillery unit he
smoked a lot of grass
watching the pretty colors
in the sky
smoked a lot of grass &
caught some flak one time
I think that's what you
call it, flak.

his right eye ruined for good
they shipped him home
with some pretty medals
he could only half see.

now we sit in the Wagon Wheel
drinking draft beer &
watching the pretty colors
of a Hamm's Beer sign.

Bob seldom talks about the war
but sometimes when he's drunk
he bitches about gooks & commies
& demonstrators
he bitches about buddhists &
dead buddies.

he talks about making something
of himself
some day.

he never looks at you
when he talks anymore.

the spittoon

my slovak grandfather had this friend
he knew him from the old country
I think
they looked a lot alike
the two friends
& they'd sit in the living room
sit stiffly in stuffed chairs
never looking relaxed
at times they hardly looked alive

sitting like that
their arms & legs straight
a brass spittoon on the floor
between them
this old bowl-like thing
it too from over there
looking odd in the same room
with a new tv
an embarrassment to the relatives
when they visited
they kept trying to make him
get rid of the thing
roundabout ways of course
you couldn't tell that man
to do anything.

the friends always had a warm greeting
they were so glad to see each other
you expected a lot of talk
but they spoke little
a few words in slovak maybe
a gesture with the hands
yet I never saw two men
as comfortable with each other
they KNEW each other
a couple of slovak buddhas
sitting there for hours
smiling
chewing tobacco
spitting into that spittoon
plunking gobs of tobacco-spit
into that old spittoon.

his tail conducts a symphony

when he comes in from outside
& there's a wild look in his eyes
paranoid & alert
insane with awareness
he won't let me touch him
even if he's hungry
my touch a threat
me a threat
everything a threat.

I feed him & 2 hours later
he sleeps in my lap.
his lip is cut
there's blood on his nose
his bushy tail is still
at last, full of leaves
& twigs & dirt.